DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 317 970 CS 010 018

AUTHOR Nistler, Robert J.
TITLE A Descriptive Analysis of Good Readers' and Writers' Concepts of Authorship at Grades One, Three and Five.
PUB DATE Nov 89
NOTE 18p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the National Reading Conference (39th, Austin, TX, November 28-December 2, 1989).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Authors; Elementary Education; Grade 1; Grade 3; Grade 5; Interviews; *Writing Ability; *Writing Attitudes; *Writing Instruction; *Writing Processes; Writing Research; Writing Skills; Writing Teachers
IDENTIFIERS *Author Text Relationship; Bookmaking; Childrens Writing; Descriptive Research; Texas; *Writing Development

ABSTRACT

A study examined: (1) what concepts of authorship were revealed in the oral and written language of children engaged in a bookmaking task and pre- and post-bookmaking interviews; and (2) how these concepts differ for good readers and writers in different grades. The study was conducted at two elementary schools in a small, middle-class Texas city. Participants included 36 students from first, third, and fifth grade classrooms, selected on the basis of teacher judgment and standardized test scores indicating strengths in reading and writing abilities. Data consisted of transcripts representing approximately 30 hours of interviews and dialogue with children during their writing, the students' books, and fieldnotes describing children's composing behaviors. Results indicated that early writing experiences in schools provided limited opportunities for involvement in full authoring processes. Findings suggest a need for consistent teacher education in process writing as well as means for dealing with the issue of standardized testing. Participants at all grade levels identified two major differences between their composing processes and those of authors--"true" authors write pieces of considerable length and have their books published. A number of students cited factors of solitude and uninterrupted writing time when explaining their requirements for fully involving themselves in their composing. For others, writing was a more social act. When providing authoring experiences, sensitivity to differences in children's approaches to composing is necessary. Children should be involved in true authoring experiences both at home and at school. (One table of data is included, and 20 references are attached.) (MG)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

Robert J. Nistler
University of North Texas
College of Education
P.O. Box 13857
Denton, TX 76203-3857
(817) 565-2920

ED317970

A Descriptive Analysis of Good Readers' and Writers' Concepts of Authorship At Grades One, Three and Five

Running head: CHILDREN'S CONCEPTS OF AUTHORSHIP

CS010018

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

ROBERT J. NISTLER

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

A DESCRIPTIVE ANALYSIS OF GOOD READERS' AND WRITERS' CONCEPTS OF AUTHORSHIP AT GRADES ONE, THREE AND FIVE

Researchers such as Burke-LeFevre (1987), Ede (1985), Eisenstein (1979), and Foucalt (1975) document the evolution of authorship as a concept in Western civilization. Beginning in the early Middle Ages, interactions between authors and society have served to expand, elaborate, and further define what it means to be an author. An expressive-romantic image of authorship which developed in the early nineteenth century depicts an author as isolated from the social world, a contemplative individual bowed over books, striving to get in touch with experience, truth, reality, history, or tradition.

The continued presence of this expressive-romantic image of authorship in society today exerts a great influence on instructional practice in schools (Cooper, 1986). Emphasis on writing as an individual activity has led to the structuring of assignments, courses, and methods of evaluation reflecting a tacit assumption that invention is the private, asocial act of a writer for the purpose of producing a text--an assumption which fails to acknowledge that invention is often a collaborative process (Burke-LeFevre, 1987).

In response to more traditional writing programs that promote writing as a solitary endeavor, recent research on children's written composition documents how children within a "community of authors" develop as writers (Atwell, 1987; Calkins, 1983; Graves & Hansen, 1983; Hall, 1989). The importance of such development and its relevance to current instructional practice is noted by Lamme (1989) in her claim that "One of the key facets of Whole Language instruction is authorship. As children learn to view themselves as authors, they become more aware of what authorship means" (p. 704). The Hawaii Department of Education (1985) concurs in its policy statement

endorsing child authorship, saying: "Children whose writing is published see themselves as creators of ideas, as producers of language, as functioning members of the language community" (p. D5).

Adult concepts of authorship are thoroughly described in interviews with professional authors, such as those published in the seven-book series, *Writers at Work: The Paris Review Interviews* (Plimpton, 1984), as well as in autobiographical accounts of professional writers, for example, Donald Murray (1984). However, a similarly extensive body of literature describing children's concepts of authorship does not exist.

The disparities between traditional elementary school writing programs and actual authorial practices, the call by researchers to implement elementary writing programs based on real authoring experiences, the important role children's concepts of authorship play in their development as competent readers and writers, and the lack of previous research focusing directly on children's concepts of authorship, led to this investigation. The research questions guiding this study were: (a) What concepts of authorship were revealed in the oral and written language of children engaged in a bookmaking task and pre-and post-bookmaking interviews?, and (b) How do these concepts differ for good readers and writers in first, third and fifth grades?

Method

Participants

The study was conducted during spring semester at two elementary schools in a small, middle-class, central Texas city. The building principal at each school identified two first, third and fifth grade classrooms in which it was thought children were expected to do a fair amount of writing. Thirty-six students from these classrooms were selected as potential subjects based on teacher judgment and standardized test scores indicating strengths in reading and writing abilities. Because standardized test scores were not made available to the researcher, classroom teachers ranked their

students according to test scores and shared those rankings with the researcher. Test score, and teacher judgment rankings were weighted and combined resulting in a list of 12 good readers and writers at each grade level. A general description of participants is provided in Table 1.

Table 1
Description of Participants

*First Grade
Classroom 1-A

Student	Ethnicity	Teacher Rating
Jose	Hispanic	1
Bob	Anglo	2
Mary	Anglo	3
Classroom 1-B		
Lorie	Anglo	1
Cindy	Anglo	4
Lisa	Anglo	6

*Standardized tests had not been administered prior to this investigation

Third Grade
Classroom 3-A

Student	Ethnicity	Teacher Rank	Test Score Rank	Combined Test + Teacher Rank
Ben	Anglo	1	5	2
Miguel	Hispanic	3	3	3
Kay	Anglo	4	NA	4
Classroom 3-B				
Lynne	Anglo	1	1	1
Molly	Anglo	6	2	3
Alicia	Hispanic	3	NA	4

Fifth Grade
Classrooms 5-A/B

Student	Ethnicity	Teacher Rank	Test Score Rank	Combined Test + Teacher Rank
Juan	Hispanic	1	3.6	1
Joy	Anglo	3	2.4	2
Sue	Anglo	2	3.0	6
Joan	Anglo	3	2.4	7
Jim	Anglo	2	NA	8
Mae	Anglo	4	1.8	10

Final selection of participants was dependent upon a screening interview conducted by the researcher. All 36 students were interviewed to determine their willingness to participate in the project and capability to discuss their experiences in reading and writing.

Procedures

In a manner similar to that of Emig's (1971) study of the composing processes of 12th graders, data were collected throughout three phases of student participation. In Phase One a pre-bookmaking interview probed each child's perceptions of self as author and decision-maker regarding writing. Questions included: (a) Does anyone at home read books to you? About how often?; (b) Does anyone at school read books to you? About how often? (c) Are you a reader? (d) Do you have some favorite books? (e) Can you name some of them? (f) Do you know what an author is? What does an author do? (g) Are you an author? [If yes] What makes you an author? [If no] Could you be an author? [If yes] What would you have to do? [If no] Why not? (h) Can you write? [If yes] Why do you write? Where do you write? When do you write? What is the writing like that you do at home? What is the writing like that you do at school? (i) Who reads what you write? (j) Who makes decisions about your writing? (k) Can you give me some examples of those decisions?

In the second phase of data collection, a bookmaking activity placed each child in the position of being an author charged with the task of producing a book using writing materials supplied by the researcher. One weekend for first graders and one week for third and fifth graders separated the time when children were informed of involvement in this composing phase and the physical act of writing.

During the bookmaking process, each child worked individually on development of a written text. Over the course of one week, approximately 30 minutes for writing were

allotted each day. The actual use of this time and whether more was needed was determined by each writer.

Data collection concluded with a post-bookmaking interview in which each participant was asked to describe personal authoring processes and compare them to those of other authors. Questions included: (a) Go through your book page by page so you can tell me what you did on each page; (b) If you had more time, what else would you add? (c) If you had more time, would you change anything? (d) What did you do that's just like what an author does? (e) Do authors do anything that you didn't do? (f) Do authors do anything that you can't do?

For all interviews, this structured outline of questions was a means of gathering consistent information across participants and was developed from literature on students' perceptions of reading and writing processes (Calkins, 1986; Graves, 1983; Graves & Hansen, 1983), professional authors beliefs about authorship (Murray, 1984; Plimpton, 1984) and the researcher's earlier pilot studies exploring children's concepts of authorship. The combination of semiformal guided interviews and a performance task addressed methodological concerns for using interviews to gather data on cognitive functions as noted by Bogdan and Taylor (1975), Ericsson and Simon (1980), and Garner (1987).

Data Analysis

Data consisted of transcripts representing approximately 30 hours of interviews and dialogue with children during their writing, the students' books, and fieldnotes describing participant composing behaviors. All data were analyzed at each grade level for what they revealed about children's concepts of authorship. Early analysis was guided by coding data according to general aspects of authorship derived from the literature (Calkins, 1986; Moffett, 1981; Plimpton, 1984). In response to research question one, narrative descriptions outlined individual and within-group concepts of

authorship held by participants in this study. These descriptions, organized categorically, formed the data base for addressing the second research question regarding differences in concepts of authorship among grade-level groups. As data analyses progressed, categories for describing concepts of authorship could be subsumed under three major areas: perceptions of self as author; sense of audience, revision and editing; and authors as decision makers.

Results

Perceptions of Self as Author

During pre-bookmaking interviews, 17 of the 18 children stated that authors write books. When asked if they were authors, children answered affirmatively less often for each succeeding grade level. By fifth grade, no children considered themselves authors.

In first grade, 5 children considered themselves authors and justified this status in varying ways. Factors contributing to this perception were generally related to the ability to complete written schoolwork that was relatively error free, and to nonschool-based experiences writing stories, or in two cases, to writing books. An overwhelming concern for correctness accompanied children's reports of their writing when they addressed aspects of their own composing in terms of what they believed other authors might do. Of highest priority were good handwriting, correct spelling, and other mechanics of writing. First graders did have a perception that they were authors, which developed out of writing experiences, but this sense was tied to the physical or external characteristics of the production of text.

Unlike the near unanimity in first grade, only 3 of the third graders considered themselves authors, 2 because they wrote stories, and one because he occasionally assembled his stories into a book. The remaining 3 children were indecisive and could not claim full status as authors. Unlike the first graders, the third graders

demonstrated a shifting emphasis from external concerns with the production of text to an internal concern with meaning. They separately noted concentration on the subject, decision-making, the sense of a story, use of stylistic devices for effect, and correct punctuation. Third graders acknowledged differences between their authoring processes and those of other authors. They recognized that authorship extended beyond their capabilities to produce a book of appreciable length. However, as writers of stories or short books, they felt that they might qualify as authors.

No fifth graders believed that they qualified for authorial status, although 5 felt they could become authors by writing a book. Three children felt special training such as college was necessary for learning how to write books. The trend toward the internal aspects of writing noted between first and third grades continued into fifth grade. Fifth graders thought they were most like other authors because they thought about or planned for their writing. Five children discussed this prewriting aspect of their composing processes. Publishing and length of text were attributes of authorship that fifth graders felt separated them from other authors.

Children in this study identified authors as writers of books. Across all grade level groups, one common theme related to children's beliefs that authors write books emerged during data analysis. The books that authors write are published, and for the most part, nearly all first, third, and fifth graders exhibited a limited understanding of the publishing process. In general, children understood publishing to involve sending books somewhere to get "checked out" and copied. In effect, publication as a means of sharing their writing was removed from children's composing processes.

Sense of Audience, Revision and Editing

Children displayed great differences in their sense of audience as it related to editing and revision processes. First graders viewed authorship as a right or wrong proposition. They displayed an awareness of an audience for their writing only to the

extent that texts were prepared for evaluation, usually by teachers. This limited understanding of a relationship between author and audience restricted the range of options available during composing. In preparing their texts for reading by others, the first graders were mainly concerned with editing. They generally made changes to text immediately after a word was written and rarely reread completed text. In contrast to editing, revision remained a relatively unknown and unnecessary consideration for first-grade authorship.

Consequently, it was not surprising that similarities children noted between their own composing behaviors and those of other authors related to the correctness of texts. First graders did not demonstrate the sense of process that Graves and Hansen (1983) describe as capable of "lifting children into thinking more about information and the content and organization of what authors actually do in writing" (p. 182). First graders involved in full authoring experiences during the Graves and Hansen study generally acquired this "sense of process" by the end of October. However, in April, during the time of this study, the first-grade participants' "sense of process" remained limited to editing concerns, at least to the degree that students regarded correctness as their teachers' criterion for evaluation.

Third graders' concepts of authorship were characterized by an understanding of the relationship between author and audience as evidenced by their use of a range of revision options. They did most revising at the word, sentence, and paragraph levels, and demonstrated a concern not only for correctness but also for the "sense" of what they composed by making changes that they felt would make the text more enjoyable or easier to read. Overall, third graders wrote to a wider audience than teacher, self, and family by including classmates and a generalized public.

Awareness of revision, however, did not preclude a proportionately greater concern for editing. While involved in writing stories, third graders consistently reread their

work, checking for errors. This editing focus was guided by a sort of inner-reader, and reportedly reflected teachers' emphases on spelling and mechanics of writing.

Fifth-grade participants displayed the broadest sense of audience. They were able to make specific references to points in their texts where they had written in a particular fashion with their readers in mind. Fifth graders tended to go beyond third graders' "sense" of their text to include setting and character development. To a greater extent than first- and third-grade participants, fifth graders exhibited a balanced emphasis on editing and revising. In that respect, fifth graders reflected a diminished concern, relative to other participants, for the physical appearance of their texts. All reread their writing throughout all stages of composing, revising at the word, sentence, paragraph, and composition levels. Fifth graders also exhibited a heightened awareness of multiple stages in the composing process, with half of them formally reading over their texts after they were written.

Authors as Decision Makers

Calkins (1986) describes an author as one empowered to make decisions about writing, decisions involving such things as style, audience, content, length, and fullness of development. Children in this study identified people they felt were most responsible for making decisions in their writing. Students varied in their responses by identifying one, two or three different decisionmakers for their writing. These responses included "parents," "teachers" and "self."

At first grade, "teachers" and/or "parents" appeared in all children's responses. Although three children named themselves ("self") as decision-makers, it was in addition to responses of "teacher" and "parents." First graders believed that decisions made in their writing were controlled by others, especially their teachers. Decisions were described as evaluative--judging the overall neatness of the text and handwriting.

When children identified themselves as decision-makers, they identified the same types of decisions as ascribed to their teachers, neatness and handwriting.

While composing, first graders generally exercised few options available to them as authors, possibly in part because of a limited awareness of the range of authorial options involved in writing a book, but more likely because of perceptions that authorship implied writing to do school work.

Third graders displayed a greater amount of control in the decisions made regarding their writing. The perceived role of the teacher diminished a great deal from first grade, as did the role of parents. Parents and/or teachers represented 50% (3/6) of third graders' responses, the same percentage as "self." In contrast to first grade responses of "self" that were always accompanied by "teacher," only one child in third grade added "teacher" to his response of "self."

Unlike first graders, the third graders professing to be in control of their decision-making did not focus on the physical aspects of their texts. Their reported decisions related to the sense of the text, its appeal to their audience, its form and its topic. Those children reporting the teacher as decision-maker showed a similar shift in emphasis from evaluative concerns regarding correctness to control of topic and form.

Third graders were becoming aware of their control over options but were not yet fully able to exercise them in practice. Three of the children expressed uneasiness and an unwillingness to handle options in topic or development of text. For 2 of these children, classroom writing experiences, as they described them, had prepared them to write only within well-defined guidelines. When that structure was removed, they struggled. Both children reported doing little or no writing outside of school, while the other 4 third graders described writing as a favorite leisure-time activity. Perhaps the increased opportunities outside of school for making decisions in their own writing had led the other third graders to be less dependent on external controls in their writing.

Fifth graders demonstrated the greatest awareness of themselves as decision-makers in their writing, an awareness supported in options they elected while composing. In reports of decision-making in their writing, parents were no longer mentioned as a factor, and the listing of "teacher" or "self" became an absolute choice. Children identified themselves as exclusive decision-makers in their writing in 67% (4/6) of the responses. Discussion of their responses indicated that they perceived the greatest control over topic choice and limited control over length and form. Both children who named the teacher as decision-maker cited decisions regarding the correctness of their text.

While composing, fifth graders displayed an awareness of options available for the genre in which they chose to write, distinguishing their stories by style. Awareness of a responsibility to audience led fifth graders to explore a wide variety of options for involving readers in the text. Underlying these explorations was an awareness of self as final decision-maker not present in the other writers in this study.

In keeping with Calkins' statement regarding authors and decision-making, this analysis of children's perceptions of decision-making in their writing raises questions regarding information shared earlier regarding children's perceptions of themselves as authors. In "perception of self as author," there was an inverse relationship between author status and grade level, whereby, as grade level increased, perceived authorial status decreased. In contrast, with regard to control of decision-making in writing, as grade level increased, the amount of child control of decisions increased, implying a corresponding increase in authorial status--writers empowered to make decisions.

Discussion

The early school writing experiences reported by the children in this study were controlled by teachers who emphasized the physical aspects of writing. The results of

this control were most evident in first-graders' concepts of authorship. The classroom experiences of authoring, as described by students, had been limited to writing in which the length, topic, form, and organization were not under their control. The typical format guiding children's writing was suitably named "controlled composition."

According to Graves and Hansen (1983), "Children realize authors have options because they do the following in both the reading and writing processes: exercise topic choice, revise by choice, observe different types of composing and become exposed to variant interpretations" (p. 182). The findings of this study support this position and suggest that early writing experiences need to address aspects of composing not represented in first graders' concepts of authorship. Frequent and varied experiences with composing processes from prewriting to publishing are an avenue to developing concepts of authorship not displayed by first graders in this study.

Third- and fifth- grade students also reported limited opportunities for involvement in full authoring processes, a consequence in part of the influence of testing. The state of Texas has mandated testing of children for minimum proficiency in math, reading, and writing. The tests (TEAMS for Texas Educational Assessment of Minimum Skills) are administered annually to odd-numbered grade levels. As reported by children in this study and their teachers, much of the writing that occurred in school was modelled upon the format of the test, and according to student comments, in some classrooms "writing instruction" ceased after testing was completed. Despite teachers' recognition of children in this study as good readers and writers, writing instruction focused on "minimum skills." Ms. Reader, a third-grade teacher, commented, "It is only after four years of teaching that I have learned what skills are called for on the 'TEAMS'." She noted how this knowledge has altered the focus of her writing instruction. Similarly, Ms. Brooks, a fifth grade teacher stated, "We are a minimum competency district. We don't have time in the day for the 'frill' of 'free writing'."

Increased knowledge about children as writers would empower teachers to rely less on the content of standardized tests for instructional direction. For example, the third-grade teachers involved in this study expressed concerns about conflicting information provided at writing workshops they attend. Ms. Sand noted that some presenters at workshops call for attention to mechanics and a finished product, while others advocate a process approach. Ms. Bing spoke of presenters in this manner, "They all say something different. Some encourage the marking of errors, while others do not." Teachers' concerns are reflected in children's reports of instructional emphases in classroom writing activities. The findings suggest a need for consistent and ongoing pre- and inservice teacher education in process writing as well as means for dealing with the issue of standardized testing.

Participants at all grade levels in this study identified two major differences between their composing processes and those of other authors--other authors write pieces of considerable length and have their books published. For most third and fifth graders, length was a critical attribute of books by other authors, a length considered unattainable by the children. However, the writing resulting from this project proved to be children's longest, continuous pieces of writing, a finding that demonstrates children need regular opportunities to write for extended periods of time, to carry over a single project, and to develop an area of interest over time.

A number of children cited factors of solitude and uninterrupted writing time when explaining their requirements for fully involving themselves in their composing. For others, writing was more of a social act. When providing authoring experiences, sensitivity to differences in children's approaches to composing is indicated.

Few of the older participants' concepts of authorship included a perception of themselves as authors, since they felt incapable of writing "books." The differences between children's perceptions of themselves and of professional writers as authors indicates a need to provide children with numerous experiences related to authoring. Insights into authors as people and as fellow writers could be gained by extending invitations to published authors for classroom visits, writing to them, and showing examples of their work in progress. The notion of showing work in progress could also help children come to a greater understanding of revising and editing processes. Children could be reassured that work in progress is a recursive, messy and complex process, even for professionals.

Finally, the inverse relationship between perceived author status and control of decision-making suggests that movement toward empowered authoring may not necessarily coincide with one's perception of self as author, but rather depend more on the number and quality of opportunities to engage in full authoring processes. The importance of involving children in true authoring experiences both at home and school is once again supported.

As an initial exploration into children's concepts of authorship, this study was necessarily limited: in scope, to those experiences related to authoring a book; in setting, to individual writing sessions; and, in selection of participants, to good readers and writers in first, third, and fifth grades. It is for future research to extend the findings of this study using alternative populations, settings and methods. From a greater understanding of children's concepts of authorship will come clearer applications for elementary reading and writing programs.

References

Atwell, N. (1987). *In the middle.* Upper Montclair, NJ: Boynton/Cook.

Bogdan, R. & Taylor, S. (1975). *Introduction to qualitative research methods.* New York: John Wiley.

Burke-LeFevre, Kay. (1987). *Invention is a social act. Studies in writing and rhetoric.* Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press.

Calkins, L. M. (1983). *Lessons from a child.* Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Calkins, L. M. (1986) *The art of teaching writing.* Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Cooper, M. (1986). The ecology of writing. *College English,* 48, 364-375.

Ede, L. (1985). *The concept of authorship: An historical perspective.* Paper presented at the meeting of the National Council of Teachers of English, Philadelphia, PA.

Eisenstein, E. L. (1979). *The printing press as an agent of change.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Emig, J. (1971). *The composing processes of twelfth graders.* Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English.

Ericsson, K. & Simon, H. (1980). Verbal reports as data. *Psychological Review,* 87, 215-251.

Foucault, M. (1975). What is an author? *Partisan Review,* 42, 603-614.

Garner, R. (1987). *Metacognition and reading comprehension.* Norwood, NJ: Ablex.

Graves, D. (1983). *Writing: teachers and children at work.* Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Graves, D. & Hansen, J. (1983). The author's chair. *Language Arts,* 60, 176-183.

Hall, N. (1989). *Writing with reason.* Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Hawaii Department of Education. (1985). *Children as authors handbook.* Honolulu, Hawaii:Office of Instructional Services.

Lamme, L. (1989). Authorship: A key facet of Whole Language. *The Reading Teacher,* 42, 704-710.

Moffett, J. (1981). *Coming on center.* Upper Montclair, NJ: Boynton/Cook.

Murray, D M. (1984). *Write to learn.* New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

Plimpton, G. (Ed.) (1984) *Writers at work: The Paris Review interviews (sixth series).* New York: Viking.